
DESPOTISM AND RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE IN RUSSIAN HISTORY

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LAW AND POWER. THE IDEA OF SOVEREIGNTY IN 16TH CENTURY RUSSIA

The late 15th century and the first half of 16th century is a crucial period for the formation of the ideology that would support Russian autocracy until the October Revolution. In those years, Moscow transformed from a city ruled by a Prince into the capital of an empire, whose borders would reach the Sea of Japan. The stages of this transformation had a turning point in 1564, when Ivan IV Vasilyevich received a mandate from the people of Moscow to punish the traitors of the country.

This was the last piece of a complex mosaic that would make Russian autocracy a unique phenomenon in Renaissance Europe: a monarchy in which the legislative power of the sovereign was not limited by any intermediate body. The power of the Muscovite sovereign rested not only on the consent of the people, but also on the support of the Orthodox Church that consecrated Moscow as the Third and Last Rome, the last Empire of the prophecy of Daniel (2 and 7) and its ruler as the “apostle”, destined by God to save his subjects “from the fire (of Hell) with fear” and to convert all the Heathen people to Christian faith. In this article, this evolution is analysed in all its most important phases.

Keywords: Ivan the Terrible; Sultan Mehmed; autocracy; theory of sovereignty; absolute monarchy; customary law.

Конец XV – первая половина XVI в. – это ключевой период формирования идеологии, которая будет поддерживать русское самодержавие до самой Октябрьской революции. В те годы Москва из города, управляемого князем, превращается в столицу империи, которая протянется до Японского моря.

Решающим годом в этом превращении был 1564, когда Иван IV Грозный получает от москвичей поручение наказать изменников. Это событие стало последним элементом сложной мозаики, которая сделает русское самодержавие уникальным явлением в Европе эпохи Возрождения: в этой монархии законодательная власть правителя не ограничена никакими промежуточными органами. В Московском государстве власть монарха основана не только на согласии народа, но и на поддержке православной церкви. Для нее Москва – священный город, Третий и Последний Рим, последнее

Царство в пророчестве Даниила (2 и 7), Правитель Москвы же – «апостол», которому Богом предначертано «страхом» спасти своих подданных, «исторгая из [адского] огня» и обратить в христианство всех язычников. В статье анализируются важнейшие стадии этой эволюции.

Ключевые слова: Иван Грозный; Магомет-салтан; самодержавие; теория верховной власти; абсолютная монархия; обычное право.

Ivan Groznyj and Magmet Saltan

Shortly after the conversion of the *Rus'* to Christianity, in the year 6504 from the creation of the world (996 A. D.), the Constantinopolitan bishops who came to instruct the Russians on matters of the faith, said to the Prince of Kiev, Vladimir Svjatoslavich: «Се умножишася разбойници; почто не казниши их?» Он же рече имъ: «Боюся греха» (“The bandits are increasing in number, why don’t you punish them?” Vladimir answered: “I am afraid to sin”) [Повесть временных лет, с. 86].

Five centuries later, in 1565, Ivan IV the Terrible left Moscow with the court, the treasury and his trusted followers, retreating to the fortified stronghold of Aleksandrovskaia Sloboda and leaving two letters behind: one to the Metropolitan and one to the people of Moscow. In the first, he accused the church of plotting against him with the boyars, and in the second he declared to the people that, due to the boyars’ betrayal, he was forced to abdicate, leaving them, his flock, to the wolves. The people responded, imploring the Metropolitan to beg the *Car'* to return to Moscow and to tell him: “Whomever you want to punish, punish them” [see: Maniscalco Basile, 1988, p. 27].

What do the strange affirmation of the holy prince who had converted the *Rus'* to Christianity and who declared that he could not obey a prescription of the Christian bishops for fear of committing a sin, and the imploration of the Muscovites who – faced with the fear of being, as in the past, during Ivan the Terrible’s infancy, at the mercy of the uncontrolled power of the great nobility – gave the sovereign their mandate to punish the wicked, have in common?

The answer is in part contained in Ivan IV’s Letter to his friend-enemy Andrej M. Kurbskij, in which the *car'* (царь) declares that the function of civil authority consists in the duty of saving his people from the flames [of hell], with fear [see: Послания Ивана Грозного]. The affirmation directed towards Kurbskij is positioned perfectly in the Roman-Eastern tradition of the authority of the *basileus* – elaborated by Agapetus and Eusebius¹ – as the helmsman of the vessel who has to ferry humanity from misery and pain in this world, to eternal beatitude in the afterlife.

The most evident common element is in fact the concept of “punishment” and the relationship of the right to punish with the prince’s power.

¹ See: [Migne, coll. 1163–1186]. About Agapetus see: [Shevchenko; Agapetus and the West...; Quaglioni, 1980]. See also: [Miller, 1979b, p. 277–288; Eis Konstantinon Triakontaeterikos].

Vladimir Svjatoslavich fears sinning, punishing the wicked, because he believes that he does not have the power of doing so: and this despite the Christian bishops' exhortation.

The people implore Ivan Vasil'evich to return to Moscow, and they confer him the authority of punishing those who he, the sovereign, wants to, because even the Prince of Moscow needed the mandate of the people in order to wield the (terrible) authority to punish the wicked.

Which norm prevented Vladimir from exercising that which, today, is considered one of the fundamental powers of the State? Which norm did the people of Moscow abrogate in Ivan IV's "mandate"?

The answer to these questions, and many others concerning the juridical and institutional structure of medieval Russia, lies in the *starina* (antiquity).

A sacred and immutable tradition,² crystalized in a past whose characteristics the present cannot alter, the *starina* is a source of customary norms which are stronger than positive law. It is a source of norms which the prince cannot innovate, because he did not make them: it is a *ius conuetudinis* made up of countless consolidated and crystalized traditions, *ab immemorabile*, of which the author-legislator is the people.

The path which runs from the fear to sin which stops the punishing hand of Vladimir Svjatoslavich, to the mandate which the Muscovite people confer to Ivan IV – whose outcome will be the destructions and the systematic exterminations of the *Oprichnina* – is that which has brought, in various times and places, the sovereign to be "*lex animata in Terris*"³ and the author of "public" penal justice.

In Russian lands, the evolution of law had been lengthy, and not always.

Historic experience, not only that which is European and recent [see: Diamond], shows that the formal apparatus of "public law" penal sanctions is closely connected to the maturation of complex organizational and juridical structures. In simple communities, relationships of a personal type tend to prevail, based on unwritten agreements, or also on the equally unwritten "pact" that the members of the community are allowed to resort to weapons in order to resolve conflicts, but without the use of weapons causing destabilizing factors for the community as a whole. When said community becomes more complex, the 'private' resort to the use of force becomes in fact destabilizing, but sometimes 'private' reparations of wrongdoings is still tolerated: the *wergeld* takes on the main role of 'compensatory' justice.

Later on, in social development (an increase in the complexity of the system, the improvement of administrative structure and of the government),

² A tradition invoked by Ivan IV during the ceremony of his coronation as the foundation of his right to the *otčiny* of Vladimir, Novgorod and Moscow. See: [L'idea di Roma a Mosca, p. 78, ff.; Maniscalco Basile, 1983].

³ This idea is already found in Arkitas (as quoted by Stobeus) who speaks about the king as *nomos empsychos* and, with a similar meaning, referred to the magistrate, in Cicero (*De Legibus*, 3,2). See also: [Viterbo: "Deus subiecit leges imperatori et legem animatameum misit hominibus;" and later, Matteo d'Afflito, *In utriusque Siciliae Neapolisque sanctione et constitutionum novissima praelectio*, Venetiis 1562, comment to Lib. aug., I, 31: "...et ideo dicitur [imperator] *lex animata in terris*..." See also: [Kantorowicz].

the same private justice, even in the form of payment of a pecuniary compensation to the offended party or to his family, becomes insufficient, because in a complex society the private composition of misdemeanours which the community condemns acquires a negative value which goes far beyond the concrete damage provoked by the condemned behaviour; this becomes a danger: the danger that the behaviour repeats itself and, maybe, in conditions in which reparation, for the same complexity of the community, is not possible. In conditions like these, 'reparations' must acquire a dissuasive value. The justice of 'private' vendettas and the *wergeld* does not respond to needs of this type: Something like which we call "criminal law" must then be established, that is, a set of rules which, if violated, correspond to a sanction dissuasive enough to make the guilty action 'non-remunerative' and discourages its repetition.

Only at this point the state, or however the authority capable of reserving itself the right to use force is called, intervenes to sanction the overcoming of a 'private' stage of the resolution of controversies which implicate the use of force and to establish a system of 'sanctions'.

In Russia, a social and political transformation, such that it rendered necessary the transition from a prevalently 'horizontal' structure, made up of 'equals' which regulate their own conflicts, to a 'vertical' one in which a regulating authority which issues commands equipped with a sanction which does not have prevalently 'reparatory' functions, but 'dissuasive ones', exists and will be complete only in the 17th century.

In medieval Russia, the 'penal' conscience is quite complex and, in some ways, mixed. The *Russkaja Pravda* and the *Zakon Sudnyj ljudem* (*Русская правда и Закон судный людем*) contain both elements of private vendetta and elements of Mosaic law (the principle of the talion) which contain both elements of 'private' criminal law (vendetta amongst families) and elements of 'dissuasion' (the discipline of the measure of the vendetta: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) [see: Kaiser, p. 63 ff.]: but throughout the period which goes from the drafting of the first medieval Russian code to the first *Sudebniki* (*Судебники*), the principle of paying compensation (the *vira*), which coexists, however, with 'state' forms of punishment, such as confiscation (*razgrablenie*) and, in some cases, direct punishment on behalf of the prince (prison, enslavement, or exile [see: Ibid., p. 65]). In particular, the *dikaja vira* (word for word: "wild compensation") soon becomes a form of fine to be paid to the prince, instead of compensation paid to the family of the offended party. A significant uncertainty remains regarding the number and the functions of the 'officials' of justice (*og-nishchaniny*) who, probably carried out both 'judiciary' functions (of mediation to ensure that the vendetta was adequate to the crime) and administrative functions for the patrimony of the prince. Their protection was in fact assured by the *dikaja vira* [Ibid., p. 67]. An archaic form of 'objective responsibility' was the *vina* – of which, as we will see, Peresvetov speaks as a source of judiciary corruption – a fine to be paid by the person or community within whose territory a cadaver, victim of a homicide, is found.

As in the passage of the *Povest' Vremennykh Let* which I cited above, the Church energetically made every effort to push the prince to exercise justice: "God ordered you lead your life justly on this earth, to carry out trials justly, to found them on your oath to the cross and to take care of the Russian lands" [ПСРЛ, т. 1, с. 25–75; Kaiser, p. 171], the hegumen (игумен) Feodosii advises Rostislav Mstislavich. But, until relatively later, the forms of justice as to 'public law' almost exclusively regard the fines imposed for crimes against the officers of the prince.

As Kaiser reveals, the rise of the law (to be understood as positive law, emanated by a legislator prince) was slow and discontinuous in medieval Russia, with important permanence, especially in decentralized territories, of element of a 'private justice' which indicated the strong rootedness of a juridical conception of an ascendant type [comp.: Uhlmann].

In the *Sudebnik* which Ivan III Vasil'evich had drawn up in 1497, the elements of public law are already much more evident. Dedicated to the regulation of judgements for crimes against the boyars and the *okolniči*, the Code, in many cases, provides for the death penalty as well as fines of various amounts [Штамм]. But (pecuniary) punishments are provided for the violation of legitimate orders of the prince and for judicial corruption.

In this 'juridical atmosphere', Ivan Semenovič Peresvetov's *Čelobitnye* (Челобитная) are set.⁴

Peresvetov addresses two *Čelobytnye* to the prince of Moscow, as well as some narrative works on the fall of Constantinople, on the reasons for the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and on the government of Mohammed II. In all of these works, the Turkish Empire is a model which Peresvetov proposes that the prince of Moscow imitate.

The dating of Peresvetov's works is uncertain, but it is not a great error to refer them to the era of Elena Glinskaja's regency, when Ivan IV was still a minor. Zimin holds that the model of state which Peresvetov proposes to the prince makes up an ideological presentation of the interests of the emerging class of service nobility [Зимин]. Even if Zimin's thesis does not lack elements assumed to be historically correct (for example, that a nobility of service with well-defined interests existed), it does not appear dubious that the state model which Peresvetov proposes is strongly in contrast with Slavic-Norman juridical model, founded on the *otchina* which, even in the Muscovy of the 16th century, but especially while Ivan IV was a minor, was far from extinct: a model which had justified (allowed) the excess of power of the great nobles of the sword (*bojary*) and the oppressions and abuses during Ivan Vasil'evich's childhood and about which, later on, the sovereign will complain in his first Letter to Kurbskij [Послания Ивана Грозного...].

Peresvetov's model is founded on the *groza*.

The term *groza* refers to threatening or terrifying meanings: *u-groza* means threat and the meaning of the root alludes to terrible atmospheric

⁴ About this writer-adventurer, see: [Scritti Politici; Зимин; Сочинения И. Пересветова]. See also: [Maniscalco Basile, 1990].

events, tempests or storms. “*Groznyj*” was the appellative attributed to Ivan IV “the Terrible”. But, in contrast to the connotation normally connected to the appellative, *Groznyj* does not mean “Terrible”, but “Severe”, that is, “Just”.⁵

The ‘popular’ desire for severity in the administration of the Russian lands was not a novelty. The Russian version of the *Povest’ o Drakule* – unlike the German one, in which the Transilvanian *voevoda* is represented as a cruel monster *tout court* – shows a sovereign capable of *just* cruelty; who impaled his enemies, but in his kingdom there is a fountain whose water can quench the thirst of travellers, drawing it with a golden cup which no one dares to steal.

The *groza*, therefore, delineates a state model – and a judiciary model within this state – in which the sovereign makes just laws and imposes their observance with a terrible but just severity. It is interesting that Peresvetov proposes his model, attributing the conception to *Magmet-Saltan*, to Mohammed II the Conqueror.

The reasons for this choice were various. The ‘40s of the 16th century Muscovy felt, in a significant manner, the effects of the well established filofeian ideological structure of the *traslatio imperii* and Moscow was seen as the third and last capital of the Christian empire,⁶ but the feats of Mohammed II, the Conqueror, despite the fact that he was a “Hagarene infidel”, were viewed with respect: after all, wasn’t he the instrument of God for the punishment of the sins of the second Rome and of the succession of Moscow to the head of the universal empire? Peresvetov, then, had lived in Wallachia, where he met Pëtr Rareš, “Wallachian voevoda”;⁷ he had, therefore, lived in an area in which the Turkish influence was quite strong and the Turkish state institutions were well-known. Finally, which model could be proposed to a sovereign who – at least in the works of he who had elaborated the theory of sovereignty – aspired to the secular-religious primacy on all the oecumene, if not that of the sovereign to whom God had given the capital of the universal empire as his fief?

Thus, Magmet Saltan had valiant soldiers under him and he enlivened their hearts, so that they were always ready “to play the game of death for him” and he ordered the judges to judge justly, so that the dead do not accuse the living.⁸ He then sent officers who checked whether or not

⁵ Not by chance Ivan Groznyj opens his first letter to Andrej Kuyrbskij with a quotation from Proverbs, 8:15

Богъ нащъ Троица, иже предже векъ сый и ныне
есть, Отецъ и Сынъ и Святыи Духъ, ниже начала
иметь, ниже конца, о нем же живемъ и движемся,
им же царие величаются и силнии пишут правду
[see: L’idea di Roma a Mosca]

⁶ See the letters of the starec Filofej of Pskov to Vasilij III: [see: L’idea di Roma a Mosca, p. 162, ff; Синодъ, с. 133 и далее].

⁷ See: [Scritti Politici, p. 25, note 85]. Rareš was a distant relative of Elena Glinkaja, mother of Ivan IV.

⁸ So that the judges would not carry during the night corpses in the estates of those whose properties they intended to steal and then accuse them of murder. This is a clear allusion to the abuses to which had led the establishment of the vna.

the judges judged well. If the judgement of the judges was negative, he skinned them, filled their skin with hay and hung them in the village square, and if their skin grew back he pardoned them.⁹ He did not rely on the judgment of the magnates, who are lazy because they are afraid to lose their many possessions: this was, in fact, the reason for the fall of the *Car'* Constantine.¹⁰ Magmet in fact rules with an iron fist, rewarding the good (the soldiers and the good judges) and punishing the wicked horribly but justly.

It cannot be missed, however, that Peresvetov, once the legitimacy of a model is established, referring it to the conqueror of Constantinople, later introduces elements – probably better known to him – introduced by Suleiman the Magnificent: such as the institution of judicial inspectors [Bombaci, p. 384].

Peresvetov's model is Turkish, somewhat due to second-hand knowledge, but it reflects the basic idea of a state in which the sovereign makes the laws, applies them with 'severity', founding his authority and his power on a 'caste' (not a 'class', as Zimin affirms) of professional soldiers and loyal judges who own him their fortunes and lives. It is not difficult to detect the system of *devshirme* and the corps of the Janissaries in the background of Peresvetov's *specula principis* [Veinstein; Mantran; Histoire de l'Empire ottoman].

At the base of all that is a revolutionary concept of the state, even with respect to the model in evolution of the *Sudebniki* at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century: a concept which, in a total break with the *starina*, delineates a state which is not only centralized and administrated in a 'complex' manner, but also a state governed by a sovereign whose word-law goes beyond the traditions,¹¹ and who has the power not only to administrate but also to legislate. Ultimately the sovereignty comes through the people from God who, as in the accounts of the Zemskij Sobor during which Michail Fedorovich Romanov was chosen as the new *car'*, whispers to the hearts of those who listen "*strachom i trepetom*," the words which sanction earthly authority [Maniscalco Basile, 1987].

The idea of sovereignty, therefore, had a slow evolution in Russia, but in the second half of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, it was already mature and deeply rooted.

Although the Ivan Groznyj's reign has sometimes been seen by historians as an era of cruelty and barbarity, it does, however, indicate a time in which this idea moves forward and affirms itself in a way so profound that it constitutes the base of the Russian state for centuries to come [see: De Madariaga, p. 207].

⁹ The penalty of skinning was common for corrupt judges in many other European regions. There is a legend according to which the Emperor Charles V ordered that the skin of some corrupt Sicilian judges should upholster the chairs of their successors, and an alley in Palermo, along which the judges were brought to their fate, still has the name of "Discesa dei Giudici (Alley of Judges)." In a museum in Bruges, there is an anonymous 15th-century painting depicting the torture of skinning inflicted to a prevaricating judge.

¹⁰ Peresvetov writes about Constantin XI, the last Roman basileus of Constantinopolis.

¹¹ About the basics of Roman law on *consuetudo* see: C. 8.52 [53] and D. 1.3.32.

If Ivan Peresvetov had identified the cornerstones of a modern state (justice, army, centralized administration), it is, however, the Church which stamps its seal on the doctrine of sovereignty of the *Car'*, sanctioning the profound interpenetration of *sacerdotium* and *imperium*.

The idea of sovereignty

The definition of the territory on which the power connected to a certain office is wielded is essential to the definition of the political *content* of that office. If said content was allowed to be positioned within a system of Cartesian coordinates, it would show that this is a function of the greater or lesser territorial area in which the orders issued by the person in office must be applied.

On the basis of this type of structure – we could say, more precisely, of mathematical metaphor – it cannot be doubted that, in the case of the Roman empire, at least within the ideological apparatus which describes it, in Rome, in Constantinople and then in the West, according to which the sovereign is *legibus absolutus* and *dominus mundi*,¹² this office tends towards infinity. The emperor, in fact, is, on one hand “*lex animata in teris*”, and on the other he dominates the *oecumene*: the entire inhabited world.

If this ideological structure is affirmed clearly with reference to the Western and Eastern Roman empire, it is less clear, or at least poses some questions, when the ideas which make up its fabric filter into cultures different from the Roman one, partially but not completely derived from, and not totally homogeneous to it.

In the *Skazanie o knyazjakh Vladimirskih* (*Tale of the Princes of Vladimir*) [see: *L'idea di Roma a Mosca*, p. 11], the chronicler seems to make the idea of *oecumene* shift towards a vaguely similar or at least strongly correlated meaning to the patrimonial one of the *otčina*. In other 16th century Russian texts, though, the doctrinaire elaboration regarding the power of Muscovite princes seems to gradually draw closer, not without some hesitations, to the Roman one [see: Maniscalco Basile, 1991].

Here some questions must be asked about the interpretation of two documents of great importance for the understanding of Russian political thought in 16th century: the allocution pronounced by the Metropolitan of Moscow, Makarij, during the ceremony of coronation of Ivan IV¹³ and the *Stepennaja kniga* [*L'idea di Roma a Mosca*, p. 50] are very significant with regard to this point. The focus of the analysis will have to be concentrated on a key term: *carstvo*; a term whose interpretation entails the exploration of both the aforementioned coordinates: power and the space of the power.

¹² See, among the many references, Odofridus, *Commentaria in Digestum*, Prima const., I, 1, (fol. 2, 2): “[Imperator]. Quia princeps Romanorum vocatur Imperator: quia ipse est qui omnibus subsistentibus sub sole debet posse imperare...”

¹³ “...да умножит Господь Бог лет царству твоему и положит на главе твоей венец от камени честна, и дарует тебе долготу дней и вдаст тебе Господь в деснице твоей скипетр царствия, и посадит тя на престоле правды <...> и покорит тебе вся языки варварския <...>” [see: *L'idea di Roma a Mosca*, p. 83].

In both the texts I mentioned, the term “*carstvo*” is often correlated with the connotative terms “*russskoe*” and, sometimes, with “*moskovskoe*”. These words are obviously of great importance, in order to understand the meaning of the political form to which they refer. If they were, in fact, mere ‘geographical’ connotative, the *car*’ would only be the sovereign of a territory delimited by certain boundaries within the *oecumene*: those of Russia, or of Muscovy. Would the value of the term be different, though, if it did indicate the location of the power, but not its extension: that is, ‘empire’ which coincides with Russia or empire which has its *caput* (maybe *mundi*) in Russia, and in the “imperial city” (*carstvujuschij grad*) of Moscow?

The problem has been dealt with, amongst others, by David Miller [Miller, 1979a; 1967], who observed how, in the *Stepennaya kniga*, the structure of Agapetus was adapted to a limited territorial area, that of Russia, and this interpretation finds many confirmations in sources from the 15th and 16th century,¹⁴ but there is some evidence of the fact that, inside this document – and others which are coeval, coming from the same cultural *milieu* – such an interpretation could appear restrictive.

First of all, it must be considered that meaning of “*carstvo*” does not only depend on “*y*” (in my mathematical metaphor: the boundaries of the empire), but also on “*x*”, that is, on the measure of the independence of the holder of the office of *car*’ from norms put in place by others than him: that is, in the political context of 16th century Russia and in other and more usual words, on the relationships between *sacerdotium* and *imperium*.

As can be seen, despite the limitedness of the field of analysis (the two aforementioned documents), the research is very complex and involves all of the most problematic and delicate areas of discussion relative to Russian political thought in the 16th century.

The shift of the space of power

One of the main problems which arise in the historical analysis of the ideology which is at the base of a certain political system is that of verifying if, when a political concept, coming from a specific culture is adopted by a different culture, becomes, or not, so to speak, ground, mixed with autonomous autochthonous ingredients and reassembled in such a way that, although maintaining the original *nomen*, it takes on a different juridical and political meaning.

Using an analytical approach which takes into account this perspective as to Makarij’s allocution, one wonders what is the Metropolitan of Moscow’s

¹⁴ See Ivan III’s answer to Frederick III of Augsburg:

<...>

А что еси нам говорил о королевстве, есть ли нам любо от цесаря хотети крадем поставлену быти на своей земле, – и мы Божию милостию государи на своей земли изначяла, от первых своих прародителей, а поставление имеем от Бога, как наши прародители, так и мы..., а поставления как есмя наперед сего не хотели ни от кого, так и ныне не хотим...

concept of “*vseleennaja*” (œcumene), and which are the filtering categories which allow the transposition of the Roman idea of œcumene within Russian culture in the 16th century?

First of all, it must be noted that Makarij creates his own interpretation of Agapetus’ theory, as it was elaborated in Russia by Iosif Volockij: as to the body of the *car*’ it is similar to any other man, but his power is likened to that of God Almighty [Волоцкий, с. 546]. He received the power to govern all of humanity and he has the obligation to protect it from the wolves and to bring the “Heathen” to the true faith [Miller, 1967, p. 560; Барсов, с. 57–58]. The purpose of his power, therefore, is justice (*pravda*, which means also truth): he has to hold the celestial sickle and not give liberty to those who do evil, whose souls have already left their bodies. Protecting the holy ecumenical church and exercising just judgement is most of this duty [Там же, с. 58].

Ivan IV’s enthronement ceremony, however, shows an interesting dual coronation [Там же, с. 49–50]: it is Ivan IV himself, in fact, who declares to the Metropolitan that his ancestors were princes of Vladimir, Novgorod and Moscow, asking for recognition of these titles. Makarij does so and blesses the sovereign, but Ivan IV continues, asking to be “anointed and crowned great prince and *car*’ crowned by God, according to our ancient custom (*starina*)” [Там же, с. 48].

The overlapping is evident, in this formula, of two different ‘offices’: that of the heir of the “*otčina*” of all of Russia [Там же, с. 46], and that of a *car*’ crowned by God. But according to which ‘ancient custom’, if in none of the previous *chiny venchaniia* [L’idea di Roma a Mosca, p. 67] do explicit references to an ecumenical enthronement appear? One could think of Vladimir Monomach, spoken of in the legend certainly known to the Metropolitan of Moscow, who reports it in the Velikije Minei-Čet’i [Там же, p. I 1]. In fact, at the end of the first chapter of the I Step of the *Stepennaja Kniga*, referring to Vladimir Jaroslavich’s baptism, the text says that, with baptism, the prince of Kiev:

Василие наречень бысть. Василие
же по Греческому языку глаголется,
по Русскому же языку толкуется царь.
Василий бо царское священство, царское
же и божественное именование
[Степенная книга, с. 60]

Therefore, with baptism the first Russian Christian prince and converter to Christianity of the Rus’ is *basileus* and *car*’, and it is a sacred ‘investiture’ which, on one hand, clearly separates ‘patrimonial’ power from ‘ecumenical’ power; on the other, it makes it possible for Russia, initially only “*otčina*” of the prince, to become the solid nucleus of aggregation of all the members of the Orthodox church and all of those who should have

become members, that is, all of humanity [Бапов, с. 51]. That political conception, therefore, instead of looking at the contrast between *otčina* and *oecumene* with embarrassment, manages to reconcile the limitedness of Russian borders with their future extension to all inhabited lands.

Constantine, Vladimir and Ivan IV

From this point of view, it may be possible to read Miller' [Miller, 1970, p. 440] interpretation of "*ruskoe carstvo*", contained in the *Stepennaja kniga*, differently.

Besides the substantial allusions to the Augustan ancestry of the Muscovite princes, the *Stepennaja kniga* gives significant prominence to their ancestors from Kiev, whose title transfers from Kiev, to Vladimir and, finally, to Moscow: that is, to the Christian princes: to Ol'ga and, above all, to Vladimir Svjatoslavič who – like Constantine – converted his people [Послание Новгородского архиепископа Макария, с. 22–23; Miller, 1970, p. 103], just like Ivan IV will have to convert the Heathen to the true faith [Бапов, с. 51].

The union in the person of the prince of the right-duty to carry out justice and that of converting the pagans, conceals a sort of "*plenitudo potestatis*" which seems to give an etymological and not only ceremonial meaning to the term "*carstvujučij grad*" [Там же, с. 56]: the *ruskoe carstvo* is not a reign whose borders coincide with those of Russia, but the Russian empire, in which the "empire-city" and also all of barbarian peoples (all the world) must be included, the latter converted to the true faith by its prince-*sacerdos*.

Such a structure suggests a certain syncretism, but not a contradiction, at least in so much as, for example, Frederick II could be both the king of Sicily and emperor: king of a *regnum* and emperor of all of the *regna*, including his own.

In the conception which seems to be at the base of the two document I am referring to, a more mature and complete elaboration of the Muscovite prince's sovereignty can be noted, as compared to that which emerges from genealogical legends, and also – maybe – compared to that of Filofej. And the legendary, symbolic and prophetic approach is substituted by a more lucid structure which hinges once again on the imperial continuity of the three Romes and the figures of the emperors-apostles: first Constantine, then Vladimir Svjatoslavič and, finally, Ivan IV: sovereigns and converters to Christianity and, as such, "apostles, and for this same reason all three *basileis*.

The eschatological duty of the Muscovite ruler – duty which he inherited from his ancestors and from Constantine – makes up the 'mask' of the *translatio* of the imperial ideology from Roman-Constantinopolitan culture to the Russian one, where it seems to coexist without contrast with the patrimonial sovereignty. It is this 'mask' which makes the succession

of the rulers of the oecumene noteworthy: the empire of Augustus is marked by the birth of Christ, that of Constantine and Vladimir by their apostolic duty, while the principedom of Rjurik – the link between Rome and Kiev – Vladimir – Moscow – is just a great power (*velikaja derzhava*) [Там же]: the ‘mask’ does not always correspond to the facts, and in this case the facts are simply absorbed, as they are, into the parabola of the formation and affirmation of the Muscovite empire.

This empire maintains its own patrimonial stability which acts as support, when the conditions demand it (for example, when the prince is called to convert ‘barbaric peoples’), for the ecumenical vocation of the *carstvo*.

Makarij’s conception appears, therefore, quite elastic from a strictly political point of view, but not less vast and all-inclusive: when the princes were not also “apostles, they were, in any case, hereditary sovereigns, repositories of a sacred inheritance. When they were – or will be – instruments of the conversion of barbaric peoples, they were – and will be – emperors and “apostles” and, as such, *domini mundi*.

As shown, the Russian State is rapidly consolidated in the 16th century with the formation of the essential organs of a “modern” State:¹⁵ justice, army, legislative power of the sovereign.

A structure of power whose justification – a unique case in the panorama of the European monarchies of the time – is both descendent and ascendant: from God to the people, from the people to the sovereign.

It is a particularly elastic ideological structure, such that it allows that the ascendant justification of power (i. e.: in the Zemskie Sobory between the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century) but also the descendent one (from God to the *car*) mix, expanding the (absolute) power of a *car*, whose authority derives directly or indirectly from God, well beyond the borders of Muscovy towards the unlimited territory of cecumene.

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¹⁵ The historical category of “absolute state” has recently been called into question [see: Dunning and references there in], stating that the state that emerges from the Middle Ages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries would be better defined as “Fiscal-Military” rather than “Absolute”. Beyond the value (very modest) of labels stuck to complex historical phenomena, the new definition seems ignore that the attribute “absolute” connected to the state does not allude to a state in which the monarchical power, instead of being tied to the ancient medieval institutions and relatively weak, it is strong and, we would say with in modern terms, authoritarian. In the historical categorization, “absolute” simply means that, as stated by Jean Bodin, the sovereign has the power to make laws “without the consent of his subjects” [cf.: Quagliani, 2004, p. 45 and ff. and references cited therein]. To be “*legibus absolutus*”, of course, does not mean that the monarch is allowed to do whatever he likes, but it means that he is not bound by the customary laws that formed the juridical substrate of Medieval reigns. In a word: he is a legislator.

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